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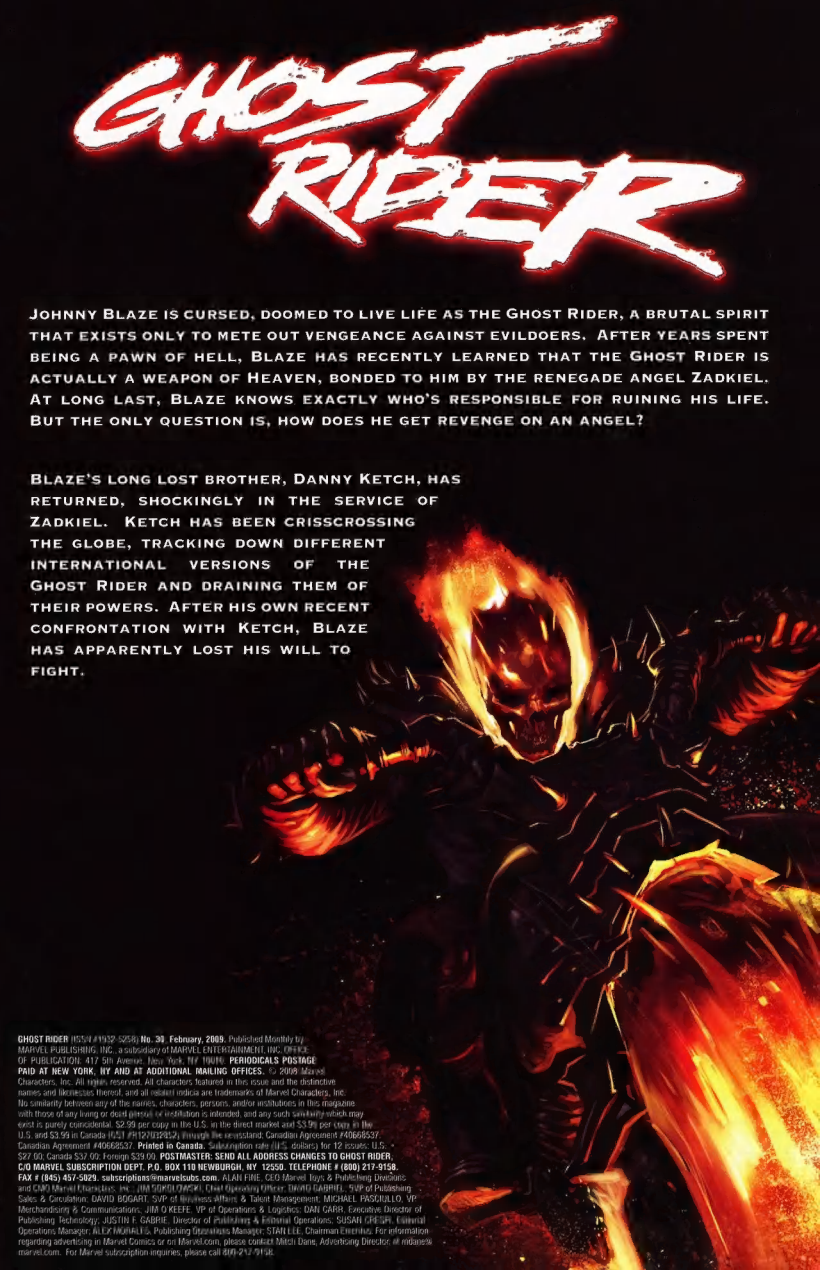
GHOST RIDER

Johnny Blaze is cursed, doomed to live life as the Ghost Rider, a brutal spirit that exists only to mete out vengeance against evildoers. After years spent being a pawn of hell, Blaze has recently learned that the Ghost Rider is actually a weapon of Heaven, bonded to him by the renegade angel Zadkiel. At long last, Blaze knows exactly who's responsible for ruining his life. But the only question is, how does he get revenge on an angel?

Blaze's long lost brother, Danny Ketch, has returned, shockingly in the service of Zadkiel. Ketch has been crisscrossing the globe, tracking down different international versions of the Ghost Rider and draining them of their powers. After his own recent confrontation with Ketch, Blaze has apparently lost his will to fight.



GHOST RIDER (ISSN 1932-5258) **No. 30, February, 2009.** Published Monthly by MARVEL PUBLISHING, INC., a subsidiary of MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT, INC. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 417 5th Avenue, New York, NY 10016. **PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID AT NEW YORK, NY AND AT ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES.** © 2009 Marvel Characters, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters featured in this issue and the distinctive names and likenesses thereof, and all related indicia are trademarks of Marvel Characters, Inc. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. $2.99 per copy in the U.S. in the direct market and $3.99 per copy in the U.S. and $3.99 in Canada (GST #R127032852). Through the newsstand, Canadian Agreement #40668537. Canadian Agreement #40668537. **Printed in Canada.** Subscription rate (U.S. dollars) for 12 issues: U.S. $27.00; Canada $37.00; Foreign $39.00. **POSTMASTER: SEND ALL ADDRESS CHANGES TO GHOST RIDER, C/O MARVEL SUBSCRIPTION DEPT, P.O. BOX 110 NEWBURGH, NY 12550. TELEPHONE # (800) 217-9158. FAX # (845) 457-5029. subscriptions@marvelsubs.com.** ALAN FINE, CEO Marvel Toys & Publishing Divisions and CAPCOM Characters, Inc.; JIM SOKOLOWSKI, Chief Operating Officer; DAVID GABRIEL, SVP of Publishing Sales & Circulation; DAVID BOGART, SVP of Business Affairs & Talent Management; MICHAEL PASCIULLO, VP Merchandising & Communications; JIM O'KEEFE, VP of Operations & Logistics; DAN CARR, Executive Director of Publishing Technology; JUSTIN F. GABRIE, Director of Publishing & Editorial Operations; SUSAN CRESPI, Editorial Operations Manager; ALEX MORALES, Publishing Operations Manager; STAN LEE, Chairman Emeritus. For information regarding advertising in Marvel Comics or on Marvel.com, please contact Mitch Dane, Advertising Director, at mdane@marvel.com. For Marvel subscription inquiries, please call 800-217-9158.

TOKYO, JAPAN.
どけ--!
どけい!どいてくれ--!
SKKRRREEEEEL
先生!
世話人、どうしたんだ?
HE'S DEAD.

WHA... WHO ARE YOU?
I COULD SENSE THAT MY MASTER WAS IN TROUBLE. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO HIM?
I DIDN'T KILL HIM, PAL.
HE DID THAT TO HIMSELF, ONCE HE REALIZED HE'D FINALLY HAVE TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH.
TOOK A SWORD TO HIS OWN GUT RATHER THAN ADMIT HE'D BEEN LYING TO YOU ALL THESE YEARS.
NO, YOU ARE THE LIAR HERE, GAIJIN!
THIS MAN WAS MY TEACHER. MY CARETAKER.
YEAH, I HAD ONE OF THOSE ONCE TOO.
TRUST ME, WHATEVER HE TOLD YOU ABOUT YOUR POWER, WHEREVER HE TOLD YOU IT CAME FROM... HE WAS LYING THROUGH HIS BLASTED TEETH.

KRASH
WAS THAT THE POWER YOU SPEAK OF, BLASPHEMER? YOU WANT TO KNOW WHERE IT COMES FROM, DO YOU?
I WILL TELL YOU.
MY POWER COMES FROM THE JIZO BOSATSU AND ALL THE TEN KINGS OF HELL.
FROM THE MOUNTAIN OF THE DEAD AND THE BLOOD POOL WHERE THE DAMNED ARE STRIPPED OF THEIR SKIN.
I AM THE MOST FEARSOME OF ALL THE BAKEMONO MONSTER-SPIRITS. THE FLAMING SPIRIT-CYCLIST CALLED YOKAI-RAIDA, CAPTAIN IN THE LORD OF DEATH'S BOSOZOKU, POSSESSED WITH THE UNEARTHLY FURY OF A THOUSAND ONI.
I AM THE AVATAR OF HELL, GAIJIN.

LAST STAND OF THE SPIRITS OF VENGEANCE

JASON AARON WRITER
TAN ENG HUAT ARTIST
JOSE VILLARRUBIA COLOR ART
VC's JOE CARAMAGNA LETTERER
ARTHUR SUYDAM COVER ARTIST
SEBASTIAN GIRNER ASSISTANT EDITOR
AXEL ALONSO EDITOR
JOE QUESADA EDITOR IN CHIEF
DAN BUCKLEY PUBLISHER

RRAAAARRRR!
WHACK
NO. YOU'RE NOT FROM HELL.
TRUST ME. I'VE BEEN THERE.
YOU'RE A VESTIGE OF GOD'S DIVINE WRATH, SERVING UNDER THE DIRECTION OF AN ANGEL NAMED ZADKIEL.
YOUR POWER COMES FROM HEAVEN.
AND I'M HERE TO TAKE IT BACK.

UT
YOSHIO KANNABE, YOU'VE SERVED HEAVEN WELL, BUT IT'S TIME NOW TO LAY DOWN YOUR BURDEN.
MY NAME IS *DANIEL KETCH*...
AND I'M GOING TO TAKE YOUR *PAIN* AWAY NOW.
AUUURRRRGGHHHHH!!

TWO HOURS LATER...
WE'RE TOO LATE.
WHY. WHAT DO YOU SEE? WHAT HAPPENED HERE?
THE SAME THING THAT'S BEEN HAPPENING ALL OVER THE WORLD, DEAR SARA. ANOTHER OF OUR NUMBER HAS FALLEN.
ANOTHER GHOST RIDER IS NO MORE.

THIS WAS KETCH, WASN'T IT?
MOST REGRETFULLY, WE MISSED HIM BY A MATTER OF HOURS.
I CAN'T BELIEVE HE TURNED LIKE THIS. CAN'T BELIEVE HE'S LET ZADKIEL MAKE HIM INTO A COLD-BLOODED MURDERER.
KETCH IS MERELY A PAWN. HE BELIEVES HE'S SAVING THESE PEOPLE BY RELIEVING THEM OF THEIR BURDEN BEFORE IT HAS THE CHANCE TO CORRUPT THEM OR TURN THEM INTO MONSTERS, AS IT HAS SO MANY OTHERS.
IF THEY HAPPEN TO DIE IN THE PROCESS, WELL, HE JUST ASSUMES THEY'RE STILL BETTER OFF.
WOULD YOU CALL THIS BETTER OFF?
THE FIRE...THE FIRE WAS SO COLD. それは私の精神を燃やした。 STAY AWAY! DON'T BURN ME ANYMORE, PLEASE!
KANNABE WILL BE NO HELP TO US NOW. JUST AS WE ARE NO HELP TO HIM.
HE DESERVED IT, NO DOUBT. HELL, WE ALL DESERVE IT.

WOULD YOU HAVE ZADKIEL WIN, BROTHER BLAZE? ONCE HE HAS CONSOLIDATED THE POWER OF ALL THE SPIRITS OF VENGEANCE, HE WILL BE UNSTOPPABLE.
THE GATES OF JANNAH WILL NOT HOLD HIM. HEAVEN WILL FALL TO THE HORDES!
WHO THE HELL CARES?
IT APPEARS, NOLEN, THAT FOOTMEN HATE HAS LOST HIS FIGHT.
DOING WHAT'S BARGAINING, HE WILL FIND IT AGAIN WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT.
SO THAT'S IT THEN. I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M LOOKING AT THE *LAST* OF THE SPIRITS OF VENGEANCE.
NO. THEY ARE STILL OUT THERE. WE WILL GO TO THEM NOW.
AND *THEN* WHAT?
AND THEN WE MAKE OUR STAND.

BLAZE IS HERE WITH THE REST. SHOULD I TAKE THEM NOW?
NO. THERE'S STILL THE CHOSEN TWO. LET THEM ALONE. WAIT UNTIL THEY ARE ALL TOGETHER. THEN WE'LL FINISH THIS ONCE AND FOR ALL.
AS YOU WISH, LORD ZADKIEL.
WHAT IS [illegible] ARE [illegible]ING DOUBTS?
I JUST NEED YOU TO REMIND ME THAT WE'RE DOING THE RIGHT THING HERE. TELL ME AGAIN THIS IS FOR THEIR OWN GOOD.

DID YOU HEAR HIM? HE SAID "WE"!
WHAT DID YOU SAY? I COULDN'T--
I SAID YES, OF COURSE IT'S FOR THEIR OWN GOOD.
THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO, AFTER THE GREAT FLOOD, MAN TASKED BY THE THRONE WITH OVERSEEING HEAVEN'S MORE CLANDESTINE OF MISSIONS.
THE LONE & PITIFUL WRATH OF GHOST RIDERS.
THAT INCLUDED OVERSEEING THE SPIRITS OF VENGEANCE, EARTHLY HOSTS IMBUED WITH A FRACTION OF POWER FROM GOD HIMSELF.
BUT THAT POWER HAS INVARIABLY PROVED TOO UNSTABLE. EVERY TIME IT CORRUPTS THE HOST, DRIVES THEM MAD, SENDS THEM SPIRALLING OUT OF CONTACT. YOU'VE SEEN THIS. YOU KNOW OF WHAT I SPEAK.
THAT POWER IN THE WRONG HANDS COULD THREATEN ALL OF EXISTENCE. IT COULD BRING DOWN THE ENTIRE HEAVENLIKE
BUT WHAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND IS IF GOD IS ALL-POWERFUL, THEN HOW COULD THE GHOST RIDERS EVER REALLY POSE A THREAT TO HIM?
YOU'RE RIGHT, GOD IS ALL-POWERFUL. BUT HIS CREATIONS ARE ANYTHING BUT.
TRUST ME. THE CELESTIAL CITY IS WELL-FIGURED VULNERABLE.

HEAVEN CAN BE LAUNCHED.

THAT'S WHAT WE SAID GUARD AGAINST, DEAR BOY. THAT'S WHY THE GHOST RIDERS MUST BE ELIMINATED, THEIR POWERS RETURNED TO HEAVEN.
THAT'S NOT HOW I HEARD IT, DANIEL...
YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE STRONG ENOUGH TO GATHER ALL THAT POWER FROM THOSE POOR SOULS. YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN SAVE THEM.
DANIEL?
THAT BOY TONIGHT, YOSHIO... HE REMINDED ME SO MUCH OF MYSELF, OF THE MAN I *USED* TO BE, AT LEAST
THAT'S GREAT, DANIEL, BUT I'M AFRAID WE'LL HAVE TO TALK MORE ABOUT THIS LATER. I'VE JUST HAD A FEW VISITORS DROP BY.
ZADKIEL, YOU TRAITOROUS DOG! LO, YOUR HOUR OF RECKONING IS AT HAND!

WE WILL SKIN YOUR WRETCHED HIDE AND LET THE BLOODY TATTERS BILLOW FROM ATOP THE SPIRES OF NEW JERUSALEM! WE WILL SCATTER YOUR ROTTEN ENTRAILS TO THE FOUR WINDS OF ETERNITY! AND WE WILL DRINK YOUR STILL-WARM BLOOD FROM THE GOBLET OF YOUR SHATTERED SKULL!
SO SWEAR THE ASURA, THE LORD'S MOST HALLOWED EXECUTIONERS. ALL PRAISE BE TO GOD, HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST.
LOVELY SPEECH.
TELL YOUR BLACK HOST TO STAND DOWN NOW AND WE MAY YET FIND A PLACE FOR YOU IN THE NINTH CIRCLE OF HELL, WHERE ALL TRAITORS OF YOUR ILK GO TO LANGUISH.
THANKS, BUT I BELIEVE I'LL TAKE MY CHANCES.

SO BE IT. PREPARE TO BE BUTCHERED.
YOU KNOW WHAT I'VE ALWAYS HATED ABOUT YOU ASURA? YOU THINK YOURSELVES SOLDIERS WHEN YOU'RE REALLY JUST CUTTHROATS AND ASSASSINS.
IT'S TRUE. WHEN WE DD NEEDED ALL THE FIRST BORN CHILDREN OF EGYPT SLAIN, YOU WERE MOST CERTAINLY THE RIGHT ANGELS FOR THE JOB. BUT DIESE WAR
TWHACK
I SLEW A SLEEPING BABE THROAT YOU CAN SLIT IN THE NIGHT! I AM ZAPHKIEL, THE BLACK HOST'S
I SLEW THE ARMIES OF THE MIDIANITES AND PHILISTINES! I SLAUGHTERED EVERY LIVING THING INSIDE THE WALLS OF JERICHO!
I FELLED 100,000 SYRIAN WARRIORS IN A SINGLE BLOODY MORNING WITH THIS VERY SWORD!
SO COME AT ME, YOU FAILING LITTLE BIRD-MEN, AND LET ME SHOW YOU HOW A SOLDIER OF THE BLACK HOST LIVES THIS TRADE!

ZADKIEL, COME IN! WHAT'S HAPPENING? ZADKIEL!
CALM DOWN, DANIEL. I CAN HEAR YOU.
WHAT IS IT, WHAT'S GOING ON?
ZADKIEL, WHAT'S HAPPENING?
NOTHING, DANIEL. JUST ENTERTAINING A FEW OLD FRIENDS IS ALL.
PTEW
NOW WHERE WERE WE?
BLAZE AND THE OTHERS...
AH, YES. AS I SAID, I KNOW WHERE THEY'RE HEADED. SO WE'LL TAKE THEM OUT ALL AT ONCE.
THE CURSE OF THE GHOST RIDERS WILL BE FINISHED.
AND I'VE FINALLY HAVE NEED THIS CITY. MINE.
WHAT WAS THAT?
I SAID WE WANT TO MAKE SURE THAT WE END THIS ONCE AND FOR ALL FOR THE GOOD OF HEAVEN.

FINE. I'LL LEAVE IMMEDIATELY
BE CAREFUL. YOU'RE ALLOWING ME TO STAND BY YOU AS AN ALLY.
THIS IS TO TRULY BE THE LAST STAND OF THE SPIRITS OF VENGEANCE. THEY WILL NOT GO GENTLY INTO THE NIGHT. I ASSURE YOU.
BUT WITH THE BLACK HOST BY YOUR SIDE...
I KNOW YOU'LL MAKE THEM SEE THE LIGHT.

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK.
HERE. LET ME JUST FIND THE LIGHT. WATCH YOUR STEP.
SORRY 'BOUT THE MESS. I BEEN A BIT OF A SHUT-IN EVER SINCE I GOT BACK FROM...WELL, NEVER MIND...
SO YOU USED TO BE A COP, HUH? I THINK YOU MENTIONED THAT ON THE PHONE, DIDN'T YOU? I WAS A COP ONCE, TOO. ONE OF NEW YORK'S FINEST.
I MISS IT. EVEN THE WORST PARTS OF THE JOB, YOU KNOW...I MISS IT EVERY SINGLE DAY.
GUESS THAT'S HOW YOU TRACKED ME DOWN, YOU BEING A COP AND ALL, HUH? THAT HOW YOU LOST YOUR HAND TOO, MR., UH...
KOWALSKI.
AND I LOST MY HAND WHEN SOMEBODY CUT IT OFF AND ATE IT.
WHERE'S THE GUN?

HERE IT IS. JUST LIKE I DESCRIBED.
READ ABOUT IT IN THE PAPER. SOME COPS IN *TENNESSEE*. THEY FOUND IT IN THE ASHES AFTER A FIRE IN SOME OLD BACKWOODS CEMETERY.
WHOLE SHACK BURNED DOWN, BUT THIS GUN WASN'T EVEN *SINGED*. SOON AS I READ THAT, I KNEW *EXACTLY* WHAT IT WAS.
HOW CAN YOU BE SURE THIS IS THE *SAME* GUN *JOHNNY BLAZE* USED TO HAVE?
BECAUSE I SEEN IT IN ACTION. *MANY* TIMES.
AND YOU'RE SURE THIS THING CAN KILL A GHOST RIDER?
IT SHOOTS *HELLFIRE*. IT'LL KILL *ANYTHING*.
BUT LIKE I TOLD YA ON THE PHONE, YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO ACTUALLY *SHOOT* IT.
GUN ONLY WORKS FOR PEOPLE WITH A *CONNECTION* TO THE GHOST RIDER. AND IF IT DIDN'T WORK FOR *ME*, IT SURE AIN'T GONNA WORK FOR Y--

CHOOM
WHO DO I MAKE THE CHECK OUT TO?
M-M-MICHAEL... MICHAEL BADILINO.
YOU GOT SOMETHING I CAN HIDE THIS IN, MICHAEL? I GOT A BOAT TO CATCH.
AND A GHOST RIDER TO HUNT.
TO BE CONTINUED...

GHOST WRITERS

"The Last Stand of the Spirits of Vengeance" just keeps rolling along, and those letters from you Ghost Writers out there just keep pouring in. Let's get right to it.

Ghost Writers:

Okay, so I just read GR #27 and first off great work! Huat's an excellent artist and I hope he sticks around for quite a while. I love Ghostie's "mid-transformation" shots where it's part Blaze, and part Ghost Rider. ALTHOUGH, I really have only one VERY important question. Trust me, this one's gonna make you guys think...I mean you're really gonna be scratchin' your heads hard after this one (okay so maybe not but it's still a legit question). You ready for it?

How the hell come when Blackout turns out the lights you still can't see Ghost Rider's flaming skull??? I mean fire DOES illuminate dark areas right? Don't tell me Ghost Rider "turned out" his own head to humor Blackout or something. Is there maybe a rule that says Blackout can somehow put out Ghost Rider's flames as well? If not you should quickly make it a rule because.....well because.....It just bothers me, OKAY! *commence more whining than is needed* sorry, it's a minor detail but it's weird....

Aaron Huddleston
North Carolina

Well, Aaron, the simple answer is, I just wanted to do that little joke there with the fight, so I needed the panels to be all black. But that's not a very satisfying answer, is it? So we'll say that when Blackout signed up with Zadkiel, he had his power boosted, allowing him to throw a blanket of darkness over otherworldly sources of light, like GR's noggin. How's that? Do I win a No-Prize?

Dear Flaming People,

So it looks like we are finally going to get some answers with this new storyline. Please, then, could you resolve the whole Mephisto/Lucifer question once and for all? In Marvel continuity it has long been established that "Satan" does not exist, but that Mephisto often impersonates the infernal one for his own purposes. Okay. Cool with that. But then, with the start of the new series, there's Ghostie battling it out with "Lucifer." What gives? Also, can we at last agree on a single origin story for GR? It seems that every writer who has taken over the character in the past fifteen or so years has come up with a new one.

I'm digging the new direction of the series, but it's time for some clarity, ay?

Please print this letter, as I need some answers.

D.W. Miller
Old-School Ghost Rider Fan

If you look back, D.W., Johnny Blaze's original origin had him selling his soul to Satan. But later, Marvel apparently got uncomfortable with the idea of Satan appearing as a character in one of their books and instead substituted Mephisto. Over the years, Marvel has developed several such stand-ins for the devil. At one point it was revealed that Daimon Hellstrom, the demonic hero known as "the Son of Satan," was actually the son of the demon Marduk Kurios. "Son of Marduk Kurios" just doesn't have the same ring to it, does it? These days, I think it's best just to simplify matters, and if you wanna use the devil, then use the devil. With the launch of the current GHOST RIDER series, Blaze's origin was taken back to the way it was originally set up, with him selling his soul to Satan, not Mephisto. Besides, Mephisto's a Spider-Man character these days, isn't he?

In regards to your concerns about GR's continuity, look, I'll level with you. Ghost Rider has a very complicated continuity, everybody knows that. And there's just no way I can take all the threads from all the different books (Zarathos, the Medallion of Power, Noble Kale, the Angel of Death) and make it all work in a way that it would still be accessible to new readers. If we worked in all those different origins, you'd need to have a Ghost Rider encyclopedia on hand just to read an issue. That would be the kiss of death for this series. My approach is just to try and move things forward, to tell new stories instead of trying to rehash what's been done before, but while still being respectful of the character's history. That's why I've brought back Danny Ketch and Caretaker and why we'll be seeing other characters from GR's past popping up soon, including Noble Kale. But it has to be done in a way that it still makes sense to people who are new to the book. So yeah, D.W., I agree with you that clarity is important, and in the coming months I will be providing more of a history of Zadkiel and his connection to the Spirit of Vengeance. As far as I'm concerned, that's the origin I'm working from now, and I think it provides the basis for lots of exciting stories. I hope you'll come along for the ride. Thanks for the questions.

Glad to see the letters page back.

Contrary to what some fans say the storyline and art work is only secondary to 'Road to Damnation'. It's kick-butt, that's what it is. However, I still have trouble with a couple inconsistencies in the story. Some fans don't like it, but Blaze and Ketch are brothers. They are descendended from Noble Kale, because the bloodline shared a shard of the Medallion of Power. Now it's just Johnny? Throwing out the established facts for the new arc is like saying Spider-Man was never bitten by a spider and the Hulk just has a skin disease. Please explain this, it doesn't fit. By the way, why hasn't any storyline ever explored the other shard?

Elbert Householder
Lisbon OH

Hey, Elbert. I don't see that we're throwing out what makes these characters who they are. If anything, I think we've gone back more to the original premise for GHOST RIDER as a supernatural horror series, while still incorporating elements from the more super-hero themed series of the 90s. As I explained in my answer to the previous letter, what we're all about here at Ghost Rider HQ is telling exciting new stories that take the character to places he hasn't been before. Thanks for reading.

I just wanted to tell you what a great job you are doing and thank whoever was responsible for bringing the greatest comic hero ever back from the depths. I have been reading comics all my life and have slowly pieced together a collection of most of volumes 1&2 of Ghost Rider. I was wondering if you could answer a few questions for me:

1) What's Johnny's beef with Satan, his deal was with Mephisto, correct?

2) When can I hope to see Mephisto and Blackheart back in action?

3) Any plans for a team-up? Possibly the classic GR and X-Men, or something new like Iron Man?

I would love to know the answers, wondering about it is killing me!

Nick Legan
Discovery Bay, CA

Thanks for the questions, Nick. Here are your answers.

1) Boy, everybody's got continuity concerns this month. I already answered this one though.

2) Sorry, I don't have plans for either one right now.

3) Yes, you will be seeing GR teaming-up with someone in these pages before long, but I'm afraid it won't be the X-Men or Iron Man. That Matt Fraction guy writes both of those books, and I've sworn a blood oath never to work with him, ever since that time he kidnapped me and buried me alive for three days in a coffin filled with his farts. Let's speak no more of this.

I don't need to tell you what a fantastic job you're doing on the latest GR series. I've been into comics since I was a kid in the 80's and I always liked the character but not the comics. Now, from what I gathered, I may have missed out on some really good stuff. Particularly the 90's Dan Ketch/GR series, which seems to be pretty popular, though I'd say most readers prefer Blaze.

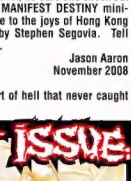
Mostly I'd like to commend you on maintaining and publishing a regular letters page, something that is shamefully all too rare in comics these days. It seems that over the last decade or so Marvel has been slowly but surely omitting letters columns from all their titles with the exceptions of AMAZING SPIDER-MAN, THUNDERBOLTS and of course GR. This, of course, is a goddamn shame. I don't know how many times I have to tell you guys, we want the columns in the actual comic! It makes the price of the comic itself so much more worth it.

Keep up the great work, I'll keep buying!

J. Anthony
Orange, CT

Hey, J., glad you dig the letters column. I always get a kick out of writing it. Sorry there wasn't a column last month, but we got squeezed out by some ads. Gotta pay the bills, you know? Keep those letters coming though, folks.

Next issue we'll visit the City of Skulls along the Congo River and meet the last two members of our Ghost Rider Survival Squad, and we'll also see more of the hook-handed Kowalski, and wait a minute, is that a Ghost Rider on a shark? What the...



GHOST RIDER: DANNY KETCH #3

Until then, be sure to pick up the all new GHOST RIDER: DANNY KETCH mini-series, which spins out of these very pages, and is written by Simon Spurrier, author of the most recent GHOST RIDER Annual as well as the kick-ass series Gutsville from Image, and drawn by the legendary Javier Saltares, long-time Flamehead artist who designed the sweet new "blue" look for Ketch.

And while you're at it, be sure and check out my new WOLVERINE: MANIFEST DESTINY mini-series, which is an ode to the joys of Hong Kong cinema, as penciled by Stephen Segovia. Tell your LCS that I sent ya.

Jason Aaron
November 2008

"The highway is a part of hell that never caught on fire."

16 SHELLS FROM A HELLFIRE SHOTGUN

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